Project Summary

This project intends to mend the damages caused by the conflict between Ukraine and Russia by optimizing essential Polish energy production through a more streamlined and sophisticated coal facility. This will welcome Ukrainian refugees into the Polish economy and society through skilled training and employment while promoting decreased energy costs for Europeans through organizational innovation.

Background

Considering a number of issues in two communities I identify with, one in New York and another in Poland, I began doing research, outreach, and exploration in both regions to see how I may make a meaningful and impactful difference in the world around me. After spending the summer in Poland and seeing the first-hand impacts in Poland of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, I recognized the challenges faced not only by Ukrainian refugees but by European citizens as well in terms of the energy crisis. In turn, I wanted to develop a pragmatic approach to helping those affected.

The current conflict between Ukraine and Russia is deeply rooted in political, historical, cultural, and geographical disputes. Following a series of annexations and subsequent sanctions, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine today seems to have no end in sight. This conflict has caused millions of individuals to be displaced and many thousands have lost their lives.

Russia is one of the largest producers of oil and natural gas in the world and has significant reserves of both. Europe has long been dependent on Russia for its energy needs. However, Europe's reliance on Russian fuel has brought political and strategic risks. Russia has inhibited supply, driving up energy costs drastically for Europeans. Such increases make heating unaffordable across Europe, causing suffering, especially in the cold of winter. In turn, Europe has been working to diversify its energy sources and reduce its dependence on Russian energy. Poland offers great potential.

The coal industry is of significant importance in Poland, providing energy and employment for the country. This industry has a long history in Poland and coal-fired power plants provide a significant portion of the country's electricity. Polish coal production sites are significantly located in the regions which border Ukraine. Recently, millions of Ukrainian refugees fled to Poland but often face poverty due to a lack of employment opportunities and language barriers. Needing to flee one's home is traumatic enough, but being thrown into a different culture, environment, and circumstance is evermore challenging. Employing these Ukrainian refugees in the coal industry will simultaneously provide the refugees with stability, a sense of purpose, and career progression opportunities while also incorporating them within the Polish economy, community, and culture. Furthermore, investing in machinery that optimizes the workflow process associated with coal processing would improve efficiency and safety within the industry. Such mechanisms can be equipped with advanced safety features, such as cameras and sensors, reducing the risk of accidents and injuries to the operator and other workers. Ultimately, investing in this field would help decrease energy costs for Europeans while supporting Ukrainian refugees as well.

Transitions toward renewable energy are planned by the European Union to occur over the next several decades. Realistically then, for the likely entirety of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia, reliance on fossil fuels will remain paramount. Fortunately, this means of energy is only for the time being and the aforementioned improvements to the industry are a step in the right direction toward attaining peace. Over time, these facilities can and will be converted to work toward renewable means of energy as Poland and the greater European Union have already emphasized. Relying on coal now is merely an emergency measure to protect Europeans and to support Ukrainian refugees while still allowing for the transition toward renewable energy in the future. Therefore, these fossil fuel-based means are solely a temporary solution to alleviate the dangerous and deadly effects facing all Europeans while also serving as a stepping stone toward renewable energy in the future.

Implementation & Anticipated Results

As a result, this project was shaped by an understanding and awareness of the local Polish energy system, the influx of Ukrainian refugees residing within Poland, and the detrimental financial effects placed on Europeans by fuel embargoes. This comprehensive plan aims to increase workflow efficiencies, improve safety standards, lower costs for consumers, and increase employment opportunities for refugees with the goal to improve quality of life at large.

Let me introduce myself: my name is Ethan Paliwoda and I am earning a Bachelor's in Science degree as well as a Master’s in Business Administration. Soon, I will matriculate to medical school where I will become a Doctor of Medicine. Throughout my life, I have held a myriad of leadership roles. I have
extensive formal and informal training, experience, and education across many leadership positions that have prepared me to tackle each aspect of this project and pass my knowledge on to those who will certainly benefit the most. I wish to pursue this project because I have seen the effects that this conflict has had not only on Ukraine but also on Poland and the rest of the world alike. I recently visited Poland during the summer of 2022 and witnessed first hand the hardships that many individuals, both Polish and Ukrainian, are currently facing. Many live in fear. They already worry about war coming to Poland. Why should they have to worry about affording heating and electricity as well? I wish to utilize my skills and knowledge to help alleviate the pain that far too many are experiencing.

Mielec is a historically industrial city located in south-eastern Poland. This city is known for its manufacturing and engineering industries, which include aviation, aerospace, and communications. Until technological advancements sufficiently fuel these necessary industries with renewable sources of fuel, coal remains the primary fuel source. Working within Mielec, the Konefał Danuta i Wspólnicy Spółka Jawna group has worked transorganizationally throughout the coal processing operation in order to power the country and create a warmer Poland through safe, ecological, and economical means. This organization is one of the select few groups with the authorization to mediate the coal production process. They facilitate extraction, coordinate transportation and storage, work with a myriad of organizations, and ship the fuel to those that need it. This group has the influence and means to make a real difference in the energy industry. I personally reached out to the group after developing my ideas, have established a relationship with the organization, and now understand what the group needs to best serve the people.

Working with the organization, I will try to make strides toward peace in several ways. Using the knowledge gained through my current MBA program, I began analyzing practices within the group to look for optimization opportunities. Considering the inefficiencies and safety risks associated with outdated equipment use, investing in equipment and improved workflow strategies will streamline the production process as well as decrease associated time, energy, and costs. By lowering such costs, the organization will be in a better fiscal position to then lower fuel sales costs to the consumer, and through worker-operated equipment substitution, safety risks will be mitigated as workers are moved out of harm’s way. Investing in modern equipment would increase efficiency, lower costs, improve safety, and best ensure that at least part of the changes made will endure after the project is enacted.

Before the project starts, I will develop a managerial and leadership training curriculum which I will enact across the organization to supplement the workers’ individual expertise with applicable research-based theory. Using knowledge gained from my MBA training, once I arrive I will begin consulting, educating, and creating change aimed at identifying and correcting flaws in the company’s standard operating procedures. Focusing on new transformational leadership practices would then further promote the project goals by targeting areas for growth and improvement. Specifically, I will assist in the implementation of these principles and help optimize performance by improving workflow efficiency and lowering costs on the administrative end. These optimizations will allow, not only for lowered energy costs for consumers, but increased job opportunities for refugees. I will also train the workers on best practices for communication, collaboration, and leadership. With these learned skills, Ukrainian workers will be able to take their expertise back home with them eventually as they begin rebuilding their nation better.

Along with private and public investment into the organization, the funds generously allocated through Projects for Peace will transform the energy industry by increasing the group’s technological and managerial capabilities. In particular, investing in needed excavating technology will not only promote coal processing but can later be repurposed toward developing renewable energy sources. This, with improved managerial practices, in turn, will decrease extraction time, resources, and costs which will then decrease energy costs for consumers as a whole. As a result, energy will become more affordable for each and every person, offsetting the current increased cost of energy. These changes will be noticeable in real-time as individuals themselves witness decreasing costs for not only their family and friends but for many more. Additionally, these improvements will be self-sustaining and allow for further growth and development well into the future. After I depart from Poland and as renewable energy gains more traction, the group will be in a position to transition its model into one that continues to provide power to those who need it in a sustainable manner. Consequently, European families can once again stay assured that their children can rest comfortably in a heated home without breaking the bank. Peace is a state of being where all are collectively free to strive toward overarching harmony and it comes in many forms. Investing in energy will help bring about peace. Investing in Polish energy today will save lives tomorrow.